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ABSTRACT

This document consists of three symposia papers on human resources development (HRD) in Asia. "The Impact of Action Learning on the Conflict-Handling Styles of Managers in a Malaysian Firm" (Antony Hii, Michael J. Marquardt) presented results of a quantitative study of a three-month action learning program on managers' conflict-management skills. The statistical analysis showed a significant increase in the desired integrative style of handling conflict in the participating group. "What Is It Like To Be an HRD Practitioner in Taiwan?" (Ya-Hui [Bella] Lien) describes the results of an interpretive study of the "lived experiences" of HRD practitioners. The following three major themes about HRD in Taiwanese work culture were introduced: (1) HRD is an aspect of human resources management (HRM); (2) HRD is equated with training; and (3) HRD success relies on the vision and support of top management. The final paper, "Role of Public Sector Agencies in National Human Resource Development: A Study of the Expectations of Singapore-Based Companies" (A. Ahad M. Osman-Gani) describes the importance of strategic HRD in Singapore's transition from an industrial-based to a knowledge-based economy. The study found that involvement from companies in all sectors was crucial for the success of national HRD programs. (The papers contain reference sections.) (CG).

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The Impact of Action Learning on the Conflict-Handling Styles of Managers in a Malaysian Firm

Antony Hii
Institute Teknologi Pertama

Michael J. Marquardt
George Washington University

Action learning has been proposed as an effective way of developing conflict-management skills. In this quantitative experimental study, the managers from two sections of a Malaysian technological institute were administered a pre-test - post-test of the Rahim Organization Conflict Inventory. One section of 24 managers participated in a three-month action learning program while another section of 12 managers served . The statistical analysis showed that the group who participated in action learning had a significant increase in the desired integrative style of handling conflict.

Key Words: Action Learning, Conflict Management, Malaysia

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to determine if an action learning experience resulted in managers employing more productive conflict resolution styles, specifically the integrative (collaborative) style. The research studied managers at two separate schools of a technical training institute in Malaysia.

Theoretical Framework

Changes and Leadership

The forces of growth, expansion, diversification, globalization, and technological development have made organizations more and more competitive and complex. This increased competitive intensity created the need to develop more effective leadership at almost all levels in a wide variety of organizations (Kotter, 1990). The skills required in providing effective and efficient services that meet the increasing demand of the students and also to manage personal and organizational conflicts effectively are important for both faculties and administrators. Managers must develop leadership skills, particularly conflict handling skills.

Need for developing conflict-management skills in the Higher Educational Institutions/Colleges of Malaysia

Rapid industrialization coupled with the shift towards capital-intensive production technology has changed the objectives and strategies of human resources development in Malaysia in recent years. In the process of teaching, counseling, promoting and providing other services to students, and also in working with the other professional workers, there is evidence of increasing disagreement or interpersonal conflicts which has apparently occurred between the faculty and the students, between the administrative staff and the students, or among the staff themselves (Zin, 1995). The types of conflicts, among the academic staff include disagreement on the teaching and delivery techniques, assessment strategy, curriculum design and other academic related problems. The conflicts among the administrative staff include disagreement or disputes on the promotional and marketing strategies, allocation of resources, and admission procedures, etc.

The type and the gravity of conflicts in colleges can be as large and as complicated as the conflicts that occur in the multi-national corporations (Zin, 1995). Thus, it is imperative for all faculty and administrative staff of higher educational institutions to deal with conflicts productively and effectively, although the managers that work with these organizations do not necessarily possess the qualifications or experiences that could prepare them to deal with conflicts effectively (Wafa and Lim, 1997). Furthermore, there is very little indication that the higher educational institutions have provided training or personal development programs either formally or informally to their faculty members and managers in dealing with conflicts (Zin, 1995). Although most of these managers undertake various staff development programs, it is not always possible for the colleges to release all of them to attend the development programs at the same time and hence some loss of synergy could be expected. Thus, it will be very beneficial for these managers and for the colleges if this study could provide them with a means of learning or on the

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job training that would improve their conflict handling skills and provide other personal development whilst at the same time avoiding the need to release staff for traditional development programs. However, before any development or training can be applied to managers in coping with conflicts, it is important to understand the meaning and the causes of conflicts.

Conflicts

A conflict may be the result of an individual or an interpersonal relationship, an inter-group relationship, or a combination of the three. A disagreement between two individuals for example may be related to their personal differences, their job definitions, their group memberships, or all three. According to Rahim (1983), conflict may originate at a number of intrapersonal and interpersonal levels in the organization. If conflict originates within a person, it is called intrapersonal conflict. If it originates between two or more persons, it is called interpersonal conflict. If interpersonal conflicts originate within a group, or between two or more groups, these are called intragroup and intergroup conflicts, respectively.

Also, considerable diversity among people who are interdependent in complex ways leads to conflicts and the desire to influence situations that occur around them. Hence, the ability to manage changes, to establish direction for organizations or department, to align people inside the organization or outside the organization, and to manage conflict has been identified as the key challenges among the leaders or managers of the 21st century (Kotter, 1990; Marquardt, 1999). Given this environment, it is important that individuals or leaders in organizations learn faster and more efficiently in order to cope with these changes, especially in the area of coping with conflicts. The review of literature indicates that individual managers use different conflict resolution styles when dealing with conflicts (Blake and Mouton, 1964; Thomas and Kilmann, 1974; Rahim, 1983; Sashkin, 1995).

Conflict Handling Styles The idea that individuals have different personal conflict handling styles has existed in the literature for many decades and many theorists have developed instruments to measure conflict handling styles (Kilmann and Thomas, 1977; Rahim, 1983; Sashkin, 1995). In early nineties, Mary Parker Follett (1940) identified domination, compromise, and integration as three ways of dealing with conflict. Blake and Mouton (1964) are credited with identifying five conflict-solving strategies: smoothing, compromising, forcing, withdrawal, and problem-solving. According to Blake and Shepard (1964), the five conflict-handling modes represent a degree of cooperation, or willingness to satisfy another's needs, and assertiveness, or need to satisfy one's own needs. Thomas and Kilmann (1974) later developed a conflict-mode instrument designed to determine managerial conflict-handling behavior and labeled their approaches accommodating (smoothing), compromising, competing (forcing), avoidance (withdrawal), and collaborating (problem solving).

Using a conceptualization similar to that of Blake and Mouton and Thomas, the styles of handling interpersonal conflict were differentiated into two basic dimensions, concern for self and concern for others (Rahim, 1983). In his model, Rahim (1983) proposed a classification of the five conflict-handling styles using the terms; integrating (IN) (or collaborating), obliging (OB) (or accommodating), dominating (DO) (or forcing), avoiding (AV), and compromising (CO). This classification of conflict-handling styles is based on different combinations of high and low levels of concern for self and the other person. The dominating style has been identified with a win-lose orientation and with the use of forcing behavior to win one's position. At the other extreme, the accommodating style represents trying to satisfy the other party's wishes at the expense of one's own. However, according to Rahim, the integrating style is the most preferred conflict handling style as it indicates that the manager has high concern for self and also high concern for others. Rahim's conclusion that integrating style is a better style for conflict resolution is congruent with many other conflict theorists.

Managing Conflicts To manage conflict productively, managers need to be able to communicate. In their work on the intergroup conflict, Watson and Johnson (1972) elaborated on the four kinds of communication required for effective conflict management. Firstly, it is important for each of the conflict participants to have a clear perception of the other's underlying motivations and position. Secondly, accurate communication is essential in order to allow true understanding to occur between individuals. Thirdly, an attitude of trust must be conveyed for productive interaction. Fourthly, a shared assessment of the conflict as a mutual problem is needed to motivate participants to attempt to ameliorate their differences. According to Davis (1987), conflict situations may be divided into four outcomes depending on the perspectives of the people involve. The four outcomes include lose-lose, win-lose, lose-win, and win-win. The win-win is the best outcome of all. In this situation, creative solutions are sought that provide benefits to both parties.

The kind of communication posited by Watson and Johnson (1972) represents the need to engage both parties in managing the conflict. The prescribed attempts to achieve mutual understanding and to acknowledge the concerns of all parties also reflect efforts to integrate the needs of both sides into the process of handling the conflict. Taking account of the concerns of both parties and viewing the conflict management process as a "win-win" situation

enables individuals to establish an integrating (or collaborating) style (Borisoff and Victor, 1998). Many conflict theorists maintain that integrating (or collaborating) may be highly effective in managing differences (Thomas and Kilmann, 1974; Rahim, 1983; Umiker, 1997). The reason given is that the integrating style requires the effort, effective communication, and open-minded attitude needed to ensure that the concerns of both sides are fully articulated and addressed.

Action Learning, Problem solving and managing conflicts Since its development by Revans in the 1940's, action learning has contributed tremendously within the field of human resources development. It has created new paradigms in the areas of training and development, especially in the area of the learning and training of managers. In his theory of action learning, Revans advocated that managers/individuals learned through problem solving and taking action. Action refers to solving real problems in the actual working environment. Revans (1991) also stressed that there is no learning without action and no sober and deliberate action without learning'.

Many agree that action learning is an effective method for individual learning (Peters and Smith, 1996; Raelin, 1997) and assist in the organizational development (Margerison, 1988; Levy and Brady, 1996) as well as providing an effective tool for developing leadership skills (Morris, 1991; Mumford, 1995; Marquardt, 1997). Action learning not only makes explicit to the participant managers their own inner processes of decisions, it also makes them equally attentive to the means by which those processes effect changes in the world around them. Thus, through the action learning process of continuously questioning insight, managers will develop leadership's diagnostics skills and find ways to solve conflicts competently.

A brief analysis, which indicates the applicability of action learning program in improving the conflict handling skills of managers, is summarized in table 1 below.

Table 1
Analysis on the Conflict Resolution Process and Action Learning

Category	Conflict Resolution Process	Action Learning Program (AL)
1.	Communication and discussion between participants	Communication takes place in the AL set.
2.	Two or more persons involved	Each set consists of four to eight people
3.	Participants must have clear perception of each other's position	Continuous questioning process is used in the set to clear any doubt
4.	Analysis of misunderstanding or conflicts) (Problem solving)	Set members work together to diagnose and solve problems
5.	Discussion on the differences and find way to solve them	Constant review and providing feedback to each other is one of the key functions of action learning
6.	Individual's understanding and learning of the conflicts	Individual learning is an important result from action learning
7.	Individual works on the outcome of resolution	All members of set take action after each meeting
8.	Mutual respect and trust among the participants	Set members are empowered to help each other to learn from the process

To elaborate upon the perceived effectiveness of using an action learning program in improving the conflict resolution skills of managers, from the table above, it is clear that both the process of conflict resolution and action learning are identical in many aspects. Firstly both the conflict resolution process and action learning program are established with a similar purpose. That is, both groups of people are coming together to solve their problems collectively. Secondly, the active participation in dealing with the problem are similar, both the conflict resolution program and action learning program demand all participants meet in a group and have verbal communication with

each other about the problem/conflict. Thirdly, the expected outcome and the result; the expected outcome of the meeting in both programs will be that the problem/conflict is solved, and that the participants in both groups will learn from the process of questioning, clarification, and reviewing with each other.

Research Questions

Both the null and alternative hypotheses have been identified.

Null hypotheses*: The action learning program does not have any influence on the conflict handling styles of the managers in the College A.*

Alternative Hypotheses*: The action learning program has an influence (either positively or negatively) on the conflict handling styles of the managers in the College A.*

In the null hypotheses, it was predicted that the action learning program (or the treatment) will not have any influence on the conflict handling styles of the managers of the College A. The indication was that the quantitative data of the pre-test and post-test of the managers in College A will be the same or the differences between the pre-test and post-test would not be significant. In the alternative hypotheses, it was predicted that the differences in quantitative data between the pre-test and post-test would not be significant. The differences could be positive or negative. This will indicate whether the action learning program was effective in influencing the conflict handling styles of the managers of College A or if it had a negative impact on them.

Research Methodology

The conflict handling styles of two groups of managers was collected in the pre-test and post-test. One group acted as a control group and another group underwent an action learning program (treatment) for a period of three months. The conflict handling styles of the managers of group A (group that will undergo the treatment) and the managers of group B (control group) were measured before and after the three-month program. Matching tests were carried out on both groups of data.

The research design was a Nonequivalent (Pre-test and Post-test) Control Group Design (Creswell, 1994; Campbell and Stanley, 1966) on two groups of managers in a Malaysian organization. The design is illustrated with the notation as shown in figure below,

Figure 1 - Model for Quantitative Research Design

Group A	O ----- X ----- O
Group B	O ---------- O

Population

The population in this study were the academic staff and administrative staff of the two technological colleges in Malaysia. These colleges are private higher educational institutions established in Malaysia to offered tertiary education in technological education; for instance, electrical/electronic engineering, mechanical engineering, building construction and computer science. The courses offered in these colleges are at diploma and degree level and the students are mainly graduates of Malaysian high schools. Each college has approximately a total number of 1500 students and a total number of 100 staff. The staff in these two colleges consists of experienced architects, engineers, construction technologists, computer scientists and business managers. Most of the staff possess academic qualifications of graduate and post-graduate level.

Sample

The selected population was stratified so those specific characteristics are represented in the sample. The sample consisted of managers of the college who have more than three subordinates that report directly to him or her. The managers comprise of the directors, the senior academic staff, the lecturers, and all the heads of the administrative office of the colleges. There were two groups of managers: 24 who were working in the college A situated in Kuala Lumpur and 12 managers at college B that is situated in Ipoh, Perak, 200 miles to the north of Kuala Lumpur.

Data Collection

In this study, both the quantitative data and qualitative data were collected. The data includes the demographic background of the managers, their conflict resolution styles, and responses to the interviews.

Instrument for Quantitative data

The instrument used was the Rahim Organization Conflict Inventory II (ROCI-II) (1983). The instrument consists of both the demographic information and the conflict handling styles of the managers. The ROCI-II is designed to measure five independent dimensions that represent styles of handling interpersonal conflict: Integrating (IN), Obliging (OB), Dominating (DO), Avoiding (AV), and Compromising (CO). The ROCI II forms A, B, and C measure how a manager handles conflict with his or her boss, subordinates, and peers, respectively. The five styles of handling conflict are measured by seven, six, five, six, and four statements respectively, selected on the basis of repeated factor and item analyses. A subject responds to each statement on a five-point Likert scale. The higher the score the greater use the respondent makes of that style. The instrument includes a form that records the demographic information about the subject. The ROCI-II can be administered in just eight minutes.

Rahim's instrument was chosen to collect the quantitative data because it also has, according to Khoo (1994) good validity, reliability, and suitable for cross-cultural environment.. Rahim reported that his instrument possessed test-retest reliability coefficients of .83 for Integrating, .86 for Obliging, .76 for Dominating, .79 for Avoiding and .60 for Compromising, which indicates high reliability. He also reported the coefficient alphas of (.77, .72, .72, .75 and .72) respectively. This indicates an acceptable internal consistency. Rahim's model has been used to measure the individual conflict handling styles in Malaysia (Wafa and Lim, 1997; Tamam, Hassan and Yaid, 1997). These studies however, were not used in relation to the impact of action learning on conflict handling styles.

B. Intervention

There are many different recommendations and proposals given by various authors for an effective action learning program. In this study, the intervention process was designed based on the six fundamental elements advocated by Marquardt (1997, 1999). The six fundamental elements include: (1) an action learning group or set, (2) a project, problem, or task, (3) a questioning and reflection process, (4) a commitment to action, (5) a commitment to learning, and (6) a set facilitator or learning coach.

The action learning program was introduced and conducted on Group A for three months (June - September, 1999) while the control group was not be given any treatment during this period of time. To prepare for the intervention, all the managers were given basic training and opportunity for guided practice on the theory and application of action learning. All the managers were also be trained on the basic facilitation skills, especially on process of questioning and reflection.

In Group A, managers were divided into four groups or sets, each of six persons. Organizational problems were be introduced to each set. All the problems or projects were sponsored by College A. Each set was scheduled to meet for two hours, once a week over a period of three months. The set members worked on these problems by using the action learning method. Each manager rotated to facilitate the meetings and recorded the discussion that had taken place. Each member was responsible to carry out the work and to record his/her learning throughout the process.

Data analysis

The quantitative data was analyzed according to the theory of Creswell (1994), using the descriptive statistics calculated for observations and measures at the pretest or posttest stages of experimental designs. These statistics are means, standard deviations, and ranges. The uni-variate analysis of variance (ANOVA) or *t*-test were also used to determine the statistical significance of mean score differences among treatment groups. In mathematical form, three level of analysis were applied.

1. The average score for all the five conflict handling styles on pretest were computed to identify the initial preferred styles of the managers of groups A and B.
2. The average score for all the five conflict handling styles on posttest were also computed to identify the subsequent preferred styles of the managers in two groups.
3. The result for each group were compared to identify the actual impact that the action learning has on the conflict handling styles of the managers.

Results and Findings

The most widely used acceptable test of significance on experimental design is to compute for each group pretest-posttest gain scores and to compute a t between experimental and control groups on these gain scores (Campbell and Stanley, 1963). The results listed in the table and Table 3 reports the test of significance on the Group A and Group B respectively.

Table 2

Test of significance on Gain Scores on Pretest-Posttest the Group A (treated group) t-tests for Paired Samples (conflict handling with the boss – gain scores)

	Number of	2-tail				
Variable	pairs	Corr	Sig	Mean	SD	SE of Mean
Posttest (Boss)				4.3960	.387	.100
	15	.786	.001			
Pretest (Boss)				3.7980	.593	.153
Paired Differences						
Mean	SD	SE of Mean		t-value	df	2-tail Sig
.5980	.375	.097		6.18	14	.000
99% CI (.310, .886)						
t-tests for Paired Samples –gain scores (with the Subordinates)						
	Number of	2-tail				
Variable	pairs	Corr	Sig	Mean	SD	SE of Mean
Posttest (Boss)				4.6377	.280	.078
	13	.415	.159			
Pretest (Boss)				4.2738	.278	.077
Paired Differences						
Mean	SD	SE of Mean		t-value	df	2-tail Sig
.3638	.302	.084		4.35	12	.001
99% CI (.108, .619)						
t-tests for Paired Samples - gain scores (with the Peers)						
	Number of	2-tail				
Variable	pairs	Corr	Sig	Mean	SD	SE of Mean
Posttest (Peers)				4.6377	.280	.078
	13	.415	.159			
Pretest (Peers)				4.2738	.278	.077
Paired Differences						
Mean	SD	SE of Mean		t-value	df	2-tail Sig
.3638	.302	.084		4.35	12	.001
99% CI (.108, .619)						

The total number of pairs that have gain score were 19 pairs on dealing with the boss, 18 pairs in the case of subordinates, and 19 pairs on peers. The results indicated a significant change in the mean of the sample. The null hypotheses for all three conditions were rejected at $p<0.0001$ in the case of dealing with the boss, $p<0.001$ in the case with the subordinates, and $p<0.001$ in the case with the peers. All the p-values were much less than p-value set for testing the hypothesis ($p<0.01$) with the 99% confidence interval. Based on the testing on the gain scores, it can concluded that the managers in Group A have made significant changes in using the integrating style to handle conflicts in the workplace after the three month period.

The results in Table 4 indicate that there was no significant change that had taken place between the result of the pretest and posttest in all three conditions for the managers of Group B. The p-value in the case of dealing with the boss is $p<0.031$, in the case of dealing with the subordinates, the p-value is $p<0.090$, and the third case, the p-value is $p<0.123$. All the p-values are more than the p-value set to test the hypothesis ($p<0.01$). Statistically, all the three results failed to reject the null hypotheses ($Ho : u1 - u2 = 0$). Thus, it indicated that the usage of integrating style among the managers of Group B did not change significantly over the three-month period.

Table 3

Test of significance on Gain Scores on Pretest-Posttest the Group B (control group) t-tests for Paired Samples –gain scores (with the boss)

Variable	Number of pairs	Corr	2-tail Sig	Mean	SD	SE of Mean
Posttest (Boss)				4.3200	.494	.221
	5	.800	.104			
Pretest (Boss)				3.8800	.456	.204
Paired Differences						
Mean	SD	SE of Mean	t-value		df	2-tail Sig
.4400	.303	.135	3.25		4	.031
99% CI (-.184, 1.064)						

t-tests for Paired Samples – gain scores (with the subordinates)

Variable	Number of pairs	Corr	2-tail Sig	Mean	SD	SE of Mean
Posttest (Subordinates)				4.3700	.238	.106
	5	.521	.368			
Pretest (Subordinates)				4.1500	.212	.095
Paired Differences						
Mean	SD	SE of Mean	t-value		df	2-tail Sig
.2200	.221	.099	2.22		4	.090
99% CI (-.236, .676)						

t-tests for Paired Samples – gain scores (with the Peers)

Variable	Number of pairs	Corr	2-tail Sig	Mean	SD	SE of Mean
Posttest (Peers)				4.2600	.418	.171
	6	.949	.004			
Pretest (Peers)				3.8500	.923	.377
Paired Differences						
Mean	SD	SE of Mean	t-value		df	2-tail Sig
.4100	.543	.221	1.85		5	.123
99% CI (-.483, 1.303)						

Based on the test results on the gain scores for pretest and posttest, it reveals that managers in Group A have experienced a significant improvement (with the boss, $p<0.0001$, with the subordinates $p<0.001$, and with the peers $p<0.001$) in using the integrating style. The statistical test on gain scores for Group B was not significant and it failed to reject the null hypothesis. This meant that managers in Group B (control group) did not change in using integrating style when solving the interpersonal conflicts with any of his colleagues.

In conclusion, the results show that the conflict handling styles of managers in Group A have improved after the three month period and the highest improvement is in the integrating styles and the most significant change is in the condition when the managers was resolving conflicts with the boss.

Significance of Research

The findings of this research described in this proposal are significant to several areas of study, including:

- **The first quantitative study on action learning**: From the review of literature, research on action learning programs has been conducted solely using qualitative methods. There has been no quantitative study or

statistical data reported so far. Thus, this study will be the first statistical study on the impact of action learning on the conflict resolution skills of managers.

- **The first action learning study to measure conflict management styles**: Study on the impact of action learning program has been focused on different areas, such as learning styles (Mumford, 1997) and organizational and business development (Seekings and Wilson, 1997). However, this study will be the first in conducting the study on the impact of action learning on the manager's conflict handling styles.
- **Study of leaders in educational fields** : Studies on the conflict handling skills and other personal characteristics have been conducted on managers of types of organizations that are non-educational. This study is the first of its kind on the effect that conducting action learning has on the conflict handling styles on the managers of higher education colleges. With the rapid development of educational services, especially higher education in the Asian region, this study is timely and significant to the development of effective, quality leaders and managers in educational institutions.

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What is it Like to be an HRD Practitioner in Taiwan?

Ya-Hui (Bella) Lien
National Chung Cheng University
Chia-Yi, Taiwan

This interpretive study described the lived experiences of Human Resource Development (HRD) practitioners in Taiwan. Using hermeneutic phenomenology as the methodology, five participants were interviewed about their daily work experiences as HRD practitioners. Three major themes were introduced about HRD in the Taiwanese work culture: (a) HRD is one aspect of HRM, (b) HRD is equated with training in Taiwan, and (c) HRD success relies on the visions and support of top management.

Keywords: HRD, Practitioners, HRM, Taiwan

Human Resource Development (HRD) is a relative new area of professional practice and academic study (Jacobs, 1990). In order to establish HRD as a solid, credible discipline, HRD practitioners attempt to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Nadler (1983) defined HRD as an "organized learning experiences, in a given period of time, to bring about the possibility of performance change or general growth for the individual within an organization" (p. 9). From an Adult Education perspective, Watkins (1989) suggested that HRD fosters a long-term, work-related learning capacity at the individual, group, and organizational levels. Although HRD has a variety of definitions, it is generally accepted that at least three components are included: organization development (OD), training and development (TD), and career development (CD). McLagan (1990), in fact, asserts that HRD integrates TD, OD, and CD to improve individual, group, and organizational effectiveness.

In Taiwan, Human Resource Management (HRM) is considered to be far more significant than HRD. Within the country's higher education community, however, the relatively new concept of HRD is becoming an increasingly important subject. Naturally, some confusion exists over related concepts in the fields of HRM, HRD, and industrial relations (IR). To lessen that confusion, five questions about HRD professionals in Taiwan were the focus of this study.

1. What are the various functions and definitions of HRD in business settings?
2. What are the various roles of HRD practitioners in Taiwan?
3. As internal consultants in business settings, do HRD practitioners complete essentially the same tasks as personnel managers using the employment designation "HRD" rather than "personnel"?
4. As external consultants, do HRD practitioners only help companies recruit employees or do they actually provide some human resources functions as well?
5. What is it like to be a HRD practitioner in Taiwan?

Theoretical Framework

As a discipline, human resource development is relatively new and lacks a clear theoretical foundation. However, according to Swanson (1978), theories from psychology, economics, and systems form a visual image of the three-legged stool that is HRD. Psychology, "the science of behavior and mental processes of humans and other animals" (Passmore, 1995), has its own philosophical roots. Although the greatest significant impact of psychology on HRD practice resides in the area of applied psychology, the concepts of behavioral, cognitive, and humanistic psychology specifically influence HRD as a learning process.

The major consideration of economics as an influence on HRD is in the statement that the goal of economic activity is to maximize "utility," a construct that embraces consumption, production, and related behavior. From an economic point of view, HRD is closely related to the theory of human capital theory; however, the issue of how HRD practitioners apply economic theory to practice in Taiwan's changing society is also very important.

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McLagan (1989) describes a system as a collection of interdependent, organized parts that work together in one environment to achieve the purpose of the whole. The goal of systems analysis is to capture the interrelated and complex nature of the phenomenon under study (Passmore, 1995). As a complex emerging field, HRD should be studied from a systems perspective; therefore, the manner in which both Taiwanese society and its workforce regard "HRD" as a discipline should be considered.

Research Question

"What is it like to be a HRD practitioner in Taiwan?" is the central research question upon which this study was based. Questions that are associated with the central research question include: "What is the function of HRD in the changing Taiwanese environment?" and "What is the role of HRD practitioner in Taiwan?"

Methodology

This study used qualitative research methods to interview five Taiwanese HRD practitioners. Further, it used hermeneutic phenomenology as the research methodology through which to understand the inherent phenomena (phenomenology) and to interpret the lived experiences of Taiwanese HRD practitioners (hermeneutics). Both concepts are central to interpretive inquiry (Hultgren, 1989).

The purpose of this study was to establish shared understanding and mutual agreement among Taiwanese HRD practitioners about their lived experiences in the HRD field. In-depth interview were used to gather experiential narrative material that served to develop a much deeper understanding of Taiwanese HRD practitioners in both individual and group situations. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, and themes that emerged from that text were analyzed.

Study Participants

The interview subjects were five Taiwanese HRD practitioners who ranged in age from 27 to 50+ years. They all considered themselves to be "HR" practitioners rather than "HRD" practitioners. By title, the five participants were a training supervisor, an HR manager, an independent HR consultant, an HR supervisor (Human Resource Division), and an HRD professor (Industrial Relations Department).

Text Analysis

Themes began to emerge from this study following verbatim transcription of the interview tape recordings and text analysis. The verbatim transcriptions were closely reviewed through a "back and forth" review of the text and coding technique. An extensive literature review and examination of other documents provided a triangulation of research methods in the text analysis.

Findings

My analysis of the text produced three major themes: (a) HRD is one aspect of HRM, (b) HRD is equated with training in Taiwan, and (c) HRD success relies on the visions and support of top management.

HRD is one Aspect of HRM

Compared with HRM, HRD is a relatively new term in Taiwan. However, in keeping with HR as a new trend worldwide, most Taiwanese companies changed the name "Personnel Department" to "Human Resource Department." Basically, these companies do not extend the function of human resources; their activities still focus on HR management functions such as compensation, benefits, and labor law issues. As one of participant said:

In Taiwanese organizations, the so-called HRD practitioners still deal with low-end matters. Instructional design or teacher planning is just a small portion of their daily work. We spend a lot of time on administrative work. HRD in Taiwan just part of the HRM function. I don't think they pay much attention to HRD here.

HRD is equated with training in Taiwan

According to Korth (1997), instructional design, teacher planning, and performance technology are each areas of HRD. However, HRD practitioners in Taiwan are referred to as "training specialists" since a large part of their responsibility is to deliver training.

Does HRD in Taiwan include performance technology or teaching planning? The answer is "no," therefore, Taiwanese organizations do not see the breadth of activities associated with "HRD" or even "training and development"; they just saw "training." If companies are large enough, they may have a training center to deal with all aspects of training, including some elements of teacher planning and performance technology. If companies are small, they generally buy ready-made materials and ask their "HR Specialist" to delivered the materials. One participant noted:

> The thing that I deal with most is to call the labor bureau and ask what benefits our employees can get. There's a lot of law that we need to follow, a lot of paper that we need to field. I've been thinking about planning some training activities for our employees, but it seems that it is not our company's first priority. If we really need a training program, my boss just sends people out or buys a training program and asks us to deliver it.
>
> The so-called OD, I don't think can survive in Taiwanese organizations. Training may be more visible. Organizational change is not what we need to consider; that kind of issue belongs to the top management.

HRD success relies on the visions and support of top management

Just like most organizational activities, without the top managers' commitment, lots of activities barely succeed. Therefore, if the leader of the company has a clear vision and supports training and other HRD-related activities, HRD practitioners are able do more meaningful work. Some leaders who lack a vision of HRD as a profession seek only their company's immediate financial results instead of long-term business results.

With this management philosophy in mind, HRD practitioners in Taiwan do have some strategies to re-educated top managers. One participant explained:

> HRD practitioners in Taiwan better take the HRM position and work as their strategic plan. Because we don't have enough HRM people, we need to wait and cultivate our own HRD people who share the same vision and shift the paradigm.
>
> I really appreciate my boss, who supports my training program. Even when he asks me about the results [of training on performance], and I cannot give him an answer, he still lets me do it. And it pushes me to think about performance as a result of the training.

Conclusion

According to the findings detailed in the three themes discussed, it appears that although Taiwanese HRD activities are currently considered part of HRM activities, there will be more opportunities for development in HRD-related areas. Based on my observations and the responses of my participants, in Taiwan, when the various foreign-owned and joint venture companies who focus on various HRD activities and become benchmark organizations, more opportunities will be created for HRD professionals to change Taiwanese organizations in the near future.

Contribution of Research to HRD

This study contributed to the body of knowledge in HRD by providing a deeper understanding of Taiwanese HRD practices and practitioners. In addition, through a deeper understanding of Taiwanese HRD practitioners, this study also provided a connection between theory and practice. Hopefully, this study provided useful information to other Taiwanese HRD practitioners, researchers, and educators.

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Role of Public Sector Agencies in National Human Resource Development: A Study of the Expectations of Singapore-Based Companies

AAhad M. Osman-Gani
Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

Countries and organizations are placing increasing emphasis on human resource development at the strategic level as they realise its significance to sustain competitive advantage. Singapore is developing itself from an industrial-based to a knowledge-based economy to fully capitalise on the only resource it has— the people. In the countries where public sector plays a significant role in strategic HRD, such as Singapore, the need for involvement of companies from all sectors was found to be crucial for the success of national HRD programmes.

Keywords: National HRD, Manpower Development, Public Sector

With constant changes in technology, market needs, and demographic composition of workforce, today's global business environment has become extremely competitive. As we move into the information age, knowledge and skills have become the new strategic weapon of competitive advantage in this dynamic world. These will be the key tools for achieving and sustaining competitive advantage in the dynamic global business environment of the next millennium. Peter Drucker (1993) expounds, "this worker is now at the centre of history because he now owns the key means of production: the knowledge in the head." Thurow (1997) mentions, "Knowledge has become the only source of long run sustainable competitive advantage, but knowledge can only be employed through the skills of individuals." Strategic human resource development (HRD) planning can address the issues of constant changes in knowledge and skills requirements of today's dynamic organisations.

Countries and organizations all over the world are placing an increasing emphasis on human resource development at the strategic level as they realise its significance to sustain competitive advantage. Kempton (1995) mentioned that human resource (manpower) planning and development strategies operate at both the national and organizational levels, and this is due to many reasons. Some of which are: (a) industrial structure are becoming more complex and hence, the economy will require more specialized skills, (b) rapid changes in technology and the increasing dependency on computer and information system are generating the increasing need for computer literate/proficient employees, (c) it is becoming more difficult to dismiss workers as there are more and more legislations enacted for the protection of employees, and (d) demographic changes are taking place due to employee mobility and wider access to employment information.

Many nations have recognised that effective human resource planning and development is necessary to raise the standard of living for their people. Countries are pursuing industrial development to raise standard of living, but industrial development will not be possible without an adequate pool of right people with requisite skills to do the right jobs. As such, nations are increasingly incorporating national HRD planning as an integral part of their strategic economic plan to achieve economic growth.

Bennison and Casson (1984), has outlined the sequence of manpower planning and development as: (a) Analysing current manpower resource, (b) Reviewing labour utilisation, (c) Forecasting the demand for labour, (d) Forecasting supply, and (e) Developing a manpower plan. In the whole planning process, the significance of human resource development efforts has been emphasised for continuous upgrading of skills and competencies of employees in order to compete in a changing business environment.

Tan and Torrington (1998) identified three approaches to strategic manpower planning and development: (a) social demand approach, (b) manpower requirement approach, and (c) rate of return approach. These approaches will help organizations to make strategic decisions through planned effort by management for acquiring required manpower and continuously improving employee competency levels and organizational performance. According to them, the objective of manpower development planning is to "provide a pool of skilled labour to support national development efforts in order to ensure the best use of human resources in line with national needs".

Co-ordination is very important to ensure that human capital in the nation is utilised in the optimal manner. In the formulation of national manpower plan, the relevant authorities have to take into the account the manpower requirements in different business sectors as well as in different geographical regions. At the same time, the

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authorities have to ensure that there are adequate investments in pre-employment education and the development of the existing workforce.

Singapore placed a premium on human resource development strategies since its inception, as it does not have the comparative advantage to compete on other critical resources (physical or natural). Moreover, being a small island nation of three million people, it does not have the ability to compete on cost and availability of labour like its neighbours. Thus Singapore's only sustainable comparative advantage lies in continuously developing the human resources (highly skilled and motivated workers to produce high value-added products and services). The government is fully aware of this and is developing Singapore from an industrial-based to a knowledge-based economy to fully capitalise on the only resource it has— the people.

Singapore has identified the strategic importance of human resource development at the early stage of its development journey, which is reflected in its Strategic Economic Plan (SEP). Among the eight strategic thrusts of the SEP, "Enhancing Human Resources" was identified as the first strategic thrust. The recent unveiling of Manpower21, a comprehensive plan for the development of its workforce capabilities has reinforced government's emphasis on HRD (Manpower News, September, 1999). The vision of Manpower21 is for Singapore to evolve into a "Talent Capital", where the knowledge, skills and attitude of its people are the keys of competitive advantage. To achieve this vision, six strategies and 41 recommendations have been identified. The strategies are: (a) integrated manpower planning, (b) lifelong learning for lifelong employability, (c) augmenting the talent pool, (d) transforming the work environment, (e) developing a vibrant manpower industry, and (f) Re-defining partnerships among the government, employers and trade unions. The national manpower planning in Singapore is done by an inter-ministerial committee consisting of members representing relevant bodies including the Presidents of the Universities (Osman-Gani & Tan, 1998). The policies are implemented through several strategies, interventions and initiatives taken by the key public sector agencies. Unlike many developed countries, government and the public sector agencies play significant roles in various aspects of Singapore's economic development specifically in human resource development.

Although much has been done in the area of national human resource development, no empirical findings are available that had studied the role of public sector agencies in human resource development. In addition, no study has been done in the past to identify the Singapore-based companies' expectations from the relevant government agencies with regards to the national human resource/manpower development strategies. Therefore a significant research gap exists in this area.

In order to develop a broader insight into human resource development strategies of Singapore, and to address the research gap mentioned above, the following research questions are formulated for this study:

Research Questions:

1. What are the roles of Singapore's public sector agencies in the design and implementation of national human resource development strategies?
2. What are the expectations of Singapore-based companies from key public sector agencies for the supply of required skills and competencies through national HRD strategies?

Methodology:

The research methodology for the study consisted of sample interviews, and a survey of Singapore-based companies. Interviews were conducted with the senior managers of companies representing various business sectors, and their major expectations from the key government agencies were identified. Subsequently, a survey was conducted using a structured questionnaire, which was developed based on the findings of sample interviews and the literature review. The questionnaire was tested for reliability and validity before the final administration. A panel of experts comprising of university faculty, senior officials of public sectors, and senior business executives, was consulted to verify the content, sequence, structuring and relevance of the questionnaire items. In addition, it was administered to a sample of forty managers from various business sectors of Singapore, in a pilot test. The inputs from the pilot test were incorporated in the finalization of the questionnaire, which was administered through mail and facsimile system.

A sample of 500 companies was used for this study, and the respondents were selected randomly from the "Singapore 1000" directory. This sampling frame consists a listing of top 1000 companies (based on annual sales

turnover) operating in Singapore. The stratified random sampling procedure was used by identifying the five major business sectors of Singapore: manufacturing, construction, commerce, transportation/communication, and the financial/business services sector. The classifications of the major industrial sectors were taken from the Singapore Standard Industrial Classification (1990). The study covered three major public sector agencies (hereinafter named as agencies: A, B, & C), which are primarily responsible for manpower planning and development of Singapore.

Results:

Profiles of Respondents:

A total of 109 completed questionnaires were obtained, providing an overall response rate of 21.8%. Based on previous experience in similar kind of studies, this is considered to be an acceptable number of responses for making necessary generalisations. The respondents were generally Managers/Directors of Human Resource or other relevant departments. Some of the respondents were CEOs and other senior managers of the responding companies. The respondents consisted of 45.8% local companies, 42.6% MNCs and 11.6% of others that mainly comprised of joint ventures and subsidiaries of foreign-owned companies. The majority of the respondents were from the manufacturing sector, which yielded a high response rate of 44.7%. The commerce sector was ranked second where it constituted a response rate of 19.1%. The transportation/communication sector, the construction sector and the financial/business services sector contributed 18.1%, 14.9% and 3.2% respectively to the total response rate. About 83% of the respondents came from organisations that have operated more than 10 years in Singapore, while only three organisations had less than five years of business operations in Singapore.

Roles of public sector agencies in national HRD strategies:

The roles of each of the three key government agencies were discussed in terms of the design and implementation of various HRD programs at the national level. The implications of these programs on national manpower development are discussed through the response to the first research question.

Research question 1: What are the roles of Singapore's public sector agencies in the design and implementation of national human resource development strategies?

In order to respond to the above research question, secondary information was collected from the relevant publications, and Internet websites of the three key public sector agencies. In addition, primary data were gathered through structured interviews with the senior officials of the three agencies. Following findings are presented for each of the three agencies (A, B, and C).

Public Sector Agency A:

In 1961 the agency was set up to spearhead Singapore's economic development, and its most important goal was to develop the manufacturing industry in order to create full employment in Singapore. Today the agency's programmes are responsible for contributing one third of the national GDP in manufacturing and services. The agency has also been tasked to play a role in creating an external economy through the enhancing of activities in the region. The agency also works closely with the other government agencies to ensure that relevant infrastructure and key manpower capabilities are available for industry and business needs. Economic Resource Development (ERD) is a major business function within Agency-A, which manages manpower, housing, land, and utilities. The programme has three thrusts: Resource Management, Capability Development and Manpower Augmentation.

(a) Resource Management: Resource Management thrust ensures that Singapore's manpower, utilities and land policies support the dynamic and changing need of the economy. It collaborates with other agencies to ensure that the limited resources are efficiently and effectively allocated and utilised. As Singapore progresses towards a knowledge-based economy, Resource Management poses some challenges as noted by the Deputy Prime Minister, "As we progress towards a knowledge-based economy, the nature of manufacturing and manufacturing services will change. Companies will need even more knowledge and skilled workers... .. This is why the Government is allowing more foreign talent into Singapore to augment our local talent pool. At the same time, we must correspondingly tighten up on the wide-spread indiscriminate use of unskilled foreign labour... This way we can

encourage companies to use more skilled workers without burdening them with higher costs." [ST, 14 April 1998]. To develop Singapore as a vibrant and robust global hub of knowledge-driven industries, Manpower Resource Management is one of the strategic thrusts pursued to achieve this.

(b) Capability Development: The agency tries to enhance the quality of Singapore's workforce in order to ensure sustainable economic growth. One of the means through which this is achieved, is through Capability Development thrust whereby key capabilities critical to industrial development are identified ahead of time. Under the overall economic development mission, the agency plays a strategic and highly developmental role in manpower and capability development. The liaison between agency-A and other government agencies has also resulted in the development of Specialist Manpower Programmes (SMPs) to meet manpower and capability needs of particular industries. In addition, the agency works closely with institutions of higher learning to develop more manpower training programmes so as to increase the supply of technical manpower for sectors like manufacturing and international services.

(c) Manpower Augmentation: Under the Manpower Augmentation thrust, entry of professionals and technical personnel into Singapore are facilitated. In order to meet the needs of its key programmes, the International Manpower Programme (IMP) was established to assist companies to obtain the necessary foreign manpower to support business activities using a total approach. This total approach comprises of recruitment missions, the review and formulation of policies jointly with other relevant agencies to ensure sufficient inflow of suitable foreign manpower as well as the provision of immigration facilitation for the personnel required by companies.

For the future, the Manpower & Capability Development programmes will continue to support the key thrusts of the agency and enhance Singapore's competitiveness. Firstly, Singapore's competitiveness is enhanced in high value added sectors such as the semiconductor and communications industries by identifying key capabilities and formulating initiatives to strengthen its competitive advantage. Moreover, the industry's core capability in line with new products and manufacturing trends will be enhanced. Manpower studies will also be conducted to identify gaps in capability competencies and shortfall in manpower needed for manufacturing and selected service sectors. Secondly, Singapore's local talent pool will be augmented with foreign talent through various schemes and programmes.

Public Sector Agency-B:

The agency was restructured with the integration of two major agencies-the National Productivity Board (NPB) and the Singapore Institute of Standards and Industrial Research (SISIR). Its mission is to enhance the economic competitiveness of Singapore and to provide the people with a better quality of life. Besides taking over the functions of NPB and SISIR, it was put in charge of the development of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) which were the responsibilities of the agency-A before the transfer of tasks. Agency-B's duties mainly revolve around manpower development, economic restructuring and technical progress.

Since its establishment in April 1996, it played an important role in developing the manpower of Singapore. It played a significant role during the recent Asian economic turmoil when many people were retrenched and the majority of them did not have the necessary skills to fulfil new jobs requirements. The agency has been quick to respond to this change by reinforcing on its current programmes and embarking on new ones. It has even targeted to attract 50% of the workforce to undergo skills upgrading by the year 2002.

This agency has developed two strategies aimed at developing the manpower of Singapore. These two strategies are in turn supported by six activities. Each activity will then be conducted by the implementation of at least one national manpower development programme [Refer to Figure 1].

Figure 1: Manpower Development strategies, activities and programmes of Agency-B

STRATEGY	ACTIVITY	PROGRAMME
A. Upgrade skills to meet Industry needs	A1 Plan for skills upgrading	1. Capability Development
	A2 Provide critical enabling skills for lifelong learning	2. Critical Enabling Skills
	A3 Create recognised skills ladder	3. National Skills Recognition System

	A4 Improve employer-provided training	4. People Developer 5. On-the-job Training 21
B. Improve utilisation of Human resources	B1 Improve labour force participation	6. Back to Work
	B2 Improve labour productivity	7. Job Redesign 21

[Source: Manpower Development Strategies & Programmes, 1998-2002]

Besides the above Manpower Development programme, the agency has initiated a People Developer Standard recently. It gives recognition to organisations that invest in their people, the standard offers organisations a systematic process for reviewing their human resources development practices and developing staff to achieve better business results [Productivity Digest, October 1998]. The People Developer Standard's three components were developed with references to the American Model of Human Resource Excellence, and the British model--Investors in People. It was further "aligned to the Singapore Quality Award (SQA) criteria for human resource development and management." The components were then field-tested with "organisations which are recognised for their excellent HRD practices" [Press release, 5 December 1997]. These three components can be summarised through the following Figure:

Figure 2: The People Developer Process

COMPONENTS	DIMENSIONS	EVIDENCES	ACTIONS
Commitment to People Developer	Involvement	Training Needs Analysis	Conduct of training needs analysis to achieve Business Plan
		Total Training Plan	Development of Total Training Plan to provide all staff with the requisite skills
		Career Development Plan	Integration of Career Development Plan with Total Training Plan
	Allocation of Resources	Budget	Allocation of budget to implement plan
		Staff	Allocation of staff to implement plan
Implementation to the plans developed	Action	Communication	Communication of the plans made to all staff
		Induction	Induction of all staff into their jobs
		Utilisation of Training Places	Monitoring to ensure utilisation of training places
Follow-up on development activities	Recognition	Acknowledgement of Participation	Acknowledgement of participation of staff in training
		Post-Course Review	Review courses with staff to confirm and follow-up on the learning acquired
	Evaluation	System Review	Review to assess impact on business performance
	Improvement	Utilisation of Feedback	Use feedback to improve existing programmes and plan future ones

[Source: The People Developer, Singapore and Press Release, 5 December 1997]

In order to keep abreast of the changing needs of the workforce of Singapore, the agency has attempted to improve its current Manpower Development programmes. In addition, it has seeded various alternative avenues (e.g. external consultants) to develop innovative Manpower Development programmes. Recognising the differing needs of organisations it has developed courses/programmes specially tailored for them.

Public Sector Agency-C:

This agency plays a proactive role in promoting, expanding and facilitating trade by keeping channels open and reinforcing its commercial presence overseas. The agency also helps in improving the export capabilities of local companies by actively tracking trends and identifying new markets segments and opportunities." By working closely with other government agencies and the private sector, it works towards achieving their vision of "Towards Singapore as a Global City of International Trade". Despite the recent Asian economic crisis, the agency continued with their promotional efforts instead of cutting down on them so as to realise its mission of "To contribute to Singapore's Prosperity through Trade Expansion".

Manpower Development is viewed to be crucial for the success of Trade Facilitation, which provides a wide range of support for global trade to be conducted. The support includes both hard and soft infrastructure ranging from trade operations, trade logistics to trade support services. Export Institute of Singapore (EIS) was established in March 1990, whose mission is to train export marketers and international traders to facilitate and promote Singapore's regionalization efforts. EIS helps to develop a pool of international business management and trading expertise. EIS's activities are divided mainly into three areas: International Executive Programmes, Skills Development Programmes and Market Information Conferences.

a. *International Executive Programmes:* These are full time structured courses on export marketing and international trading designed to develop skilled exporters and traders. They cover various disciplines and are multi-faceted in nature from diploma programmes to short certification courses.
b. *Skills Development Programmes:* Such programmes are specialised courses which focus on specific skills needed by export marketers and international business executives. There are nearly 60 different kinds of wide ranging courses organised to meet the needs of the industry.
c. *Market Information Conferences:* Through seminars, conferences and workshops, EIS disseminates timely information on business opportunities and provides avenues for business networking. The aim is to keep Singapore companies well informed both of business opportunities and of new developments in overseas markets. Such conferences also allow Singapore companies to network with key foreign government officials and businessmen.

Interactions with the Business Community

In order to identify the nature of relationships and interactions the public sector agencies have with the business community, the following research question was formulated:

Research Question 2: What are the expectations of Singapore-based companies from key public sector agencies for the supply of required skills and competencies through national HRD strategies?

The survey findings were analysed using the appropriate statistical tools for responding to the above research question. The results are presented through the following three tables:

Table-1: Expectations from Agency-A on National Human Resource Development Strategies

	STATEMENT	N	M*	S.D.	NOT AWARE	
					NO.	%
a.	Company is aware of the agency's HRD efforts and other programmes	81	4.48	1.40	13	13.9
b.	A Evaluates manpower capability to support overseas investments	84	5.00	1.04	9	9.7
c.	A Evaluates supply of required skills to support overseas investments	82	5.06	1.02	10	10.8
d.	A is Capable to react fast by providing support to potential investors	90	5.03	1.14	3	3.3

e.	A Provides support to certain industries only	88	5.34	1.04	5	5.4
f.	A Should provide support to other sectors	91	5.64	1.16	2	2.2
g.	A Should be directly involved in manpower training	90	5.09	1.31	3	3.2
h.	A Should take the leadership in HRD	92	5.50	1.24	1	1.1
i.	A Should inform business community	92	5.96	1.07	1	1.1
j.	Other issues mentioned	6	6.67	0.52	-	-

* (1=Strongly disagree,... ,7=Strongly agree)

It may be observed from the above table that most respondents agreed agency-A should inform the business community through newsletter/information materials on Manpower and Skills Development plans (M=5.96,). It was also found from the distribution of the respondents that nearly 90% of them agreed to such a statement. There seems to be a problem in information flow from Agency-A to the business community. One probable explanation may be due to this agency's active involvement in the macro aspects of developing the manpower of Singapore, and it did not pay much attention in keeping the Singapore-based companies informed of their plans. In addition, it was found that a majority of the respondents agreed that the agency should provide necessary support to other sectors along with manufacturing (M=5.64). Respondents also agreed that the agency should take the leadership for co-ordinating with other relevant agencies in formulating directions for Manpower Development in Singapore (M=5.50). This is probably due to the emphasis made by the Committee on Singapore's Competitiveness (CSC) to promote the twin engines (manufacturing and services sectors) to enhance Singapore's competitiveness.

Table-2: Expectations from Agency-B on National Human Resource Development Strategies

	Statement	N	M*	S.D.	NOT AWARE	
					NO.	%
a.	Company is aware of the agency's HRD efforts and other programmes	89	5.60	1.28	5	5.3
b.	B provides adequate publicity of various training courses	88	4.93	1.4	6	6.4
c.	Company receives information about training courses regularly from B	89	4.97	1.70	5	5.3
d.	B's Courses are relevant for skills development	87	4.56	1.4	5	5.4
e.	B's Courses suit future needs of Singapore	87	4.41	1.19	5	5.4
f.	SDF grants is very useful for skills development	89	5.26	1.58	3	3.3
g.	Company is aware of the 'People Developer" programme	78	5.51	1.50	14	15.2
h.	B Invites suggestions from company	76	3.43	1.46	15	16.5
i.	B Should interact more frequently with private companies	88	5.81	0.99	3	3.3
j.	B Should work more closely with other educational institutions	88	5.99	1.06	3	3.3
k.	B Should take the leadership for national HRD	89	5.18	1.41	3	3.3
l.	Other issues mentioned	6	6.67	0.52	-	-

* (1=Strongly disagree,... ,7=Strongly agree)

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It was interesting to observe that Agency-B seldom invites suggestions from local companies with regards to training and Manpower Development (M=3.43). It was also noted that only one-fifth of the respondents agreed that this agency has approached them in the past for suggestions on such issues. The results showed that the Manpower Development Division should interact more frequently with private companies (M=5.81). In addition, the agency should work more closely with educational institutions (e.g. ITEs) to prevent duplication of efforts (M=5.99). Results from the above three statements seemed to suggest that only a very few selected organisations were invited to participate in the agency's pilot-testing phase in which feedback were gathered and changes were made before the programmes were introduced formally. The secondary information indicated that the agency had not developed its new manpower programmes in isolation, rather it had always consulted with experts from the relevant fields during the process of new programmes development (Job-Redesign 21,and the CREST programme). Respondents were asked whether they were aware of the agency's HRD efforts and other programmes, and a relatively high mean score (M=5.60) indicated their awareness in this respect. This may be due to its active involvement in Manpower Development after it took over the functions of its predecessors (NPB & SISIR). It has also initiated a number of successful National Manpower Development programmes that served as important stepping-stones in helping the workforce of Singapore progress towards a knowledge-based economy.

Table-3: Expectations from Agency-C on Human Resource Development Strategies

	Statement	N	M*	S.D.	NOT AWARE	
					NO.	%
a.	Company is aware of agency's HRD efforts and other programmes	75	4.13	1.30	17	18.5
b.	C's programmes are useful in providing support	79	4.78	1.37	11	12.2
c.	C's courses meet future needs of Singapore	72	4.22	1.28	18	20.0
d.	C holds regular meetings and dialogue sessions with international trading logistics companies	65	4.29	1.31	25	27.8
e.	C invites suggestions from other sectors of business	65	4.08	1.14	25	27.8
f.	C's business Library and publications are useful in giving market intelligence and in helping to raise quality of skills development	65	4.54	1.24	25	25.8
g.	C should play a more active role in manpower development	83	5.17	1.22	7	7.8
h.	C should play a more active role in developing diploma courses	84	5.33	1.08	6	6.7
i.	C should conduct more research and organise more relevant courses	84	5.15	1.40	6	6.7
j.	C's role should include strategic manpower development programme	86	4.84	1.47	4	4.4
k.	Other issues mentioned	2	7.00	0.00	-	-

* (1=Strongly disagree,... ,7=Strongly agree)

Results show that 27.8% of the respondents were not aware that agency-C holds regular meetings and dialogue session with international trading and logistics companies to discuss the Manpower and Skills Development of Singapore. Another 27.8% of the respondents were not aware that the agency invites suggestions from other sectors of business to discuss the Manpower and Skills Development of Singapore. In addition, 18.5% of the respondents indicated unawareness of the agency's HRD efforts and various programmes. The above findings

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may be explained by the lack of publicity of the efforts rendered and activities conducted by the agency. The information available from the Internet website and other media were also found to be quite limited.

Differences were observed among the key public sector agencies in terms of their interactions with business community. Agency-B was found to have developed more awareness among the companies in terms of their HRD efforts and initiatives. Companies expect the government agencies to keep them informed on their various HRD programs and future plans on national manpower development. It was observed that the agencies vary in their primary focus on different industrial sectors, and provide leadership in helping the companies of that specific sector for the availability and development of required manpower. Public sector agencies were also found to draw upon experiences of other countries' manpower development strategies. They continuously observe and monitor the unique features of strategic HRD programs of other successful countries across the globe by travelling and interacting with key officials of those countries. In terms of taking primary leadership role in national manpower development strategies, companies expect that the newly formed Ministry of Manpower (MOM) should co-ordinate with one lead agency. But, there were differences in opinions among respondents as to who should be lead public agency in this regard. Majority of the respondents was not found to be aware of the future directions of national manpower development strategies, which they expect to know in order to plan for their future business activities.

Conclusions:

Role of public sector in national human resource development strategies is expected to vary among countries based on their economic, political and social environments, and the government policies. In the countries where public sector plays a significant role in strategic human resource development, such as Singapore, the relevant public sector agencies need to involve the business community in their strategy formulation and implementation decisions. The relevant and realistic inputs from business organizations would help the policy makers at the strategic national level to develop effective HRD programs and strategies, as well to efficiently implement those strategies. Companies expect to be aware of the policy directions and strategies taken for national manpower development, so that they can plan and organize effectively both on short and long-term perspectives.

Findings from this study will contribute to the knowledge of strategic Human Resource Development at the national level, where a significant research gap could be identified. Although some conceptual articles mentioned the need for close interactions between government, business & industry, and academic institutions, very little empirical work is available in this area. No empirical study was found to have addressed the issues of national manpower development in Asia, particularly studying the role of public sector in terms of the expectations of the business community. From this perspective, this study is expected to contribute substantially in substantiating the conceptual understanding and in future theory development. Finally, findings from this study will serve a basis for further research in this area through providing the necessary directions. Future study should include all the public sector agencies including the educational institutions. Moreover, expectations of the future graduates' employees' should be studied along with the larger business community, from a national manpower development strategy perspective in order to provide a more comprehensive coverage.

Based on the findings of this study, and extensive literature review, a conceptual framework could be proposed for better understanding of manpower development strategies of Singapore. The newly formed ministry of Manpower should lead the co-ordination and interaction of the various public and private sector agencies. All relevant government agencies, educational and training institutes, employer organisations, employee organisations should be represented in the formulation of national HRD strategies. The framework may also show the internal and external environmental factors that will affect manpower development strategies of Singapore. In the internal environment, important variables that will affect the manpower development strategies are economic, technological, political and demographic conditions in Singapore. Being a small economy, Singapore's manpower development strategies will also be influenced by the external environmental factors like global/regional economic, political, and socio-cultural and market conditions, and also the manpower development strategies of other relevant countries.

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